

TELEVISION REVIEWS

33

M'edia's 3-Hr. 'Minority Report' On Kennedy Murder a Video Rouser

It could be the tv establishment is mostly right in sniffing critically at the rude antics of such vaudeville discussion shows as Joe Pyne's and Alan Burke's. But as these shows reach for guests off the Videoland beat, the side benefits can be impressive.

For it was a guest shot on the Burke program that germinated the three-hour "A Re-Examination of the Warren Commission Findings: A Minority Report," produced by Metromedia's WNEW-TV, New York. Producer Mel Bally was so fascinated by the Burke segment last summer featuring Harold Weisberg, author of "Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report," that he went to work on the documentary-discussion spectacular which ran Saturday night (9 to midnight in New York) on all Metromedia stations—and which this week was racking up syndication sales via Metromedia's Wolper sales subsidiary (see box).

Well before the taping (Aug. 30), Warren Commission members and staff were invited by letter to be represented. Fortunately, there were no acceptances (most didn't bother to answer), and "Re-Exam-

ination" became one of those very rare tv pubservice efforts with a sharp point of view—that is, negative on the Warren Report and forcefully inquisitive about the myriad loose ends and stacks of suppressed evidence surrounding President Kennedy's assassination.

True, moderator Jim Bishop (who is adding the Kennedy shooting to his list of "The Day Such and Such" books) and Jacob Cohen, historian and author of the article, "The Missing Documents," defended the Commission Report. But they were swamped by the text and arguments of Mark Lane, attorney and author of the current best seller, "Rush to Judgment"; Leo Sauvage, correspondent for the conservative French newspaper *Le Figaro* and author of "The Oswald Affair"; author Weisberg; and Penn Jones, author of "Forgive My Grief" and editor of the *Midlothian Mirror*, a weekly newspaper published outside of Dallas.

With this gathering of anxious and articulate dissidents, it was not easy for moderator Bishop to keep the entire three hours to the methodical format, which traced events before, during and after the President's shooting. But apparently firm ground rules had been laid down in advance, and Bishop did a noble job of shutting off the arguments before they were lost in minutiae. There were numerous

slide exhibits (and a couple of filmed interviews by Lane of witnesses not called by the Commission). If there was clumsy production behind the handling of the slides, which were called for by number and apparently hard to pull out and get up, the stalls were suspenseful and only added to a viewer's absorption—three hours long of it.

Anyhow, a loud three cheers to Metromedia, WNEW, producer Mel Bally & Co. for airing the views of the panelists. For better or worse, these are men who have with incredible doggedness and considerable courage challenged the findings of President Johnson's Warren Commission. The one thing on which the entire panel agreed completely—Bishop and Cohen included—was that the pile of evidence being withheld by agencies like the FBI and CIA and suppressed in the National Archives (for release, says President Johnson, in the year 2039 yet), should be made public and now.

In this forthright airing of the challengers' views, WNEW has joined with certain American book publishers, certain American magazines (like *Ramparts* out of San Francisco), crusading American weekly newspaper publisher Penn Jones and the foreign press in putting the First Amendment of the Constitution to the uses for which it was written.

Now where are the networks? All three made gushing documentary endorsements of the Commission reports when it was released (as did the U.S. press in general).

It's noteworthy that an American newspaper with the funds and manpower of the N.Y. Times took the text of WNEW's "Re-Examination" for a five-column spread Sunday (13). Life mag, reportedly working up a major assassination takeout, came to WNEW for an advance screening.

By the way, Metromedia has now heard from members of the defunct Warren Commission and staffers will air their side at a later date.

Bill

Nine Fast Sales

WNEW-TV's three-hour "Re-examination of the Warren Commission Findings: A Minority Report," aired Saturday night (12) on Metromedia stations in New York, Washington, Kansas City, and Los Angeles, had racked up nine additional markets early this week.

Being syndicated by Metro's Wolper sales wing, the show has been sold to KPLR, St. Louis; WTIC, Hartford; WTMJ, Milwaukee; KERO, Bakersfield; KSTV, Denver; WWJ, Detroit; KUTV, Salt Lake City; KGNB, Hawaii; and KARK, Little Rock.